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AUTHOR Steward, Robbie J.; Jackson, James
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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of world view and perceived personal competencies on feelings of alienation of black second-semester freshmen on a predominantly white university campus. Forty of the 120 18-year-old, American-born black freshmen volunteered as participants. Twenty-four females and 16 males completed the following instruments: (1) the Student Demographic Questionnaire (SDQ), (2) the Personal Competency Rating Scale (PCI), (3) the Just World Scale (JWS), and (4) the University Alienation Scale (UAS). Data from these responses were analyzed to determine the relationships among perceived personal competencies, degree of feelings of alienation, and belief in a just world. Multiple regression analyses were employed to find the contribution of the belief in a just world and perceived personal competencies to the variability within feelings of alienation from the university. Results indicated that black students who had accepted white middle-class values and tended to believe in a just world expressed feelings of alienation to a lesser degree than those who had not. Such students also tended to perceive themselves as more competent overall than those who believed in a just world to a lesser extent. The implications of the findings for the self-concept of black students on a predominantly white campus are discussed. Statistical data are included on four tables. A list of 17 references is also included. (FMW)

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Black Acculturation into White Middle-Class: Who and at what costs?

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Robbie J. Steward, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
University of Kansas
116 Bailey
Lawrence, KS 666045
913-864-3931 (W)
913-894-0972 (H)

James Jackson
University of Kansas

UD 026 698

Abstract

The study examined the impact of world view and perceived personal competencies on feeling of alienation of black second-semester freshmen on a predominanlty white university campus. The relationships among the following variables were analyzed: the belief in a just world; perceived personal competencies; and, feelings of alienation. The belief in a just world and perceived personal competencies were found to significantly contribute to the variability in feelings of alienation. Negative and significant ($p<.05$) results were found between the following pairs of variables: belief in a just world and feelings of alienation ($r=-.32$; $p=.04$); and feelings of personal competency and feelings of alienation ($r=-.37$; $p=.01$). Positive and significant ($p<.05$) results were found between the belief in a just world and perceived personal competencies ($r=.39$; $p=.01$). The implications are presented and discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The university setting is an arena of much diversity. Students are exposed to new values, beliefs, and behaviors that are often very alien to their own or those of their families. Some students must learn to survive in a world where many do not share a similar history and perceive their very 'being' and culture as unacceptable. Black students have historically been one such group on predominantly white campuses. Higher levels of alienation experienced by black students are well documented in literature (Cortina, 1980; Suen, 1983). However, all black students do not experience feelings of alienation to the same extent. Today more students arrive at predominantly white campuses well innoculated with similar beliefs, attitudes, and values of their middle-class white peers. Some black students reach campus sharing a similar world view to that which institution reinforces and values.

A world view is defined as how a person perceives his/her relationship to the world and has been found to be highly correlated with a person's cultural upbringing and life experiences (D.W. Sue, 1975; Jackson 1975). World views separate individuals into groups and can create a rift that few are able or willing to cross. Even counselors, who have supposedly been trained to effectively interact with others in a validating, supportive, and respectful manner, have been found to impute negative characteristics to those clients with differing world views (D.W. Sue, 1978). More often than not, individuals adhe-

ring to a different world view than the majority in an environment will be perceived as not belonging and alienated by the majority.

One widely held world view is that of the "American Dream" which is highly reinforced by middle- and upper-class America (Ryan, 1971). The American Dream--the concept encompassing the belief that any goal is attainable by anyone with high motivation and propensity toward hard work--has deep roots in the history of present day attitudes existing within many United States' citizens. This belief is a powerful influence over self-perception as well as other-perception. It provides the fuel necessary to maintain a system in which competitive behaviors are considered the norm and are highly positively reinforced. For purposes of discussion, this world view, that dedication and committment to a goal will insures a positive outcome for all, will be referred to as the belief in a just world.

Given that individuals and systems tend to accept those with whom they have more in common, one hypotensis might be that black students who believe in a just world to a greater extent would also be less likely to report the experience of being rejected by members of middle-class white America, and therefore experience less alienation. A second hypothesis might be that those students who believe in a just world to a greater extent would also tend to perceive themselves as more competent and more able to influence events around them than those who did not. These hypotheses will be tested by examining the relationships among the degree of acculturation or in this case, belief in a just world as measured by the Just World Scale (JWS; Rubin

& Peplau, 1973), perceptions of personal competency as measured by the Perceived Personal Competency Inventory (PCI; Paul, Fulton, Ostrow, Morrill, & Kochenor, 1981), and feelings of alienation as measured by the University Alienation Scale (UAS; Burbach, 1971).

METHOD

Participants

All entering 18-year old, American-born black freshmen who lived on campus on a large predominantly white university in central United States received a questionnaire packet (N=120). Only those students who completed the entire packet were selected for inclusion in this study (n=40).

Procedure

The researcher made the necessary contacts to obtain names of potential participants. Each participant received a packet containing: a letter of consent form, a copy of each of the measures and a demographic sheet with instructions. Each instrument was a pencil and paper test and was self-administered. Packets were distributed immediately after the second semester spring break in March.

Information gained regarding individual subjects was held in strict confidence. Code numbers were assigned to each participant and only this number was used to identify participants on the psychological instruments and demographic information sheet. The code was kept in a secure location under

the control of the experimenter.

Instruments

Each survey packet contained the following: the letter of introduction and explanation; Consent for Research Participation Form; the Student Demographic Questionnnaire (SDQ); the Personal Competency Rating Scale (PCI; Paul, Pulton, Ostrow, Morrill, & Kochenor, 1981); the Just World Scale (JWS; Rubin & Peplau, 1975); and the University Alienation Scale (UAS; Burbach, 1971).

The SDQ was designed by the authors and consists of 12 items addressing participants' personal and academic backgrounds.

The PCI consists of 30 5-point Likert-type items designed to assess the extent to which individuals perceive themselves to possess competencies in four general areas: social, personal, problem-solving and functional.

The social subscale addresses interpersonal relationship abilities, including communication, assertiveness, interpersonal problem-solving, and intimacy. The personal subscale contains items reflecting an individual's abilities to adapt, plan, exercise self-control, cope with failures, manage anxiety, differentiate feelings, and enhance physical attractiveness. The problem-solving subscale examines problem-solving abilities including aspects of problem definition, alternative exploration, and resource organization. The functional subscale measures the functionalcompetencies involving computational, reasoning, reading, writing and time-use. Each of the subscales has been found to add to the

overall measure. The instrument has content validity, and reliability has been found to be .85.

The UAS consists of 25 5-point Lekert-type items that are designed to measure components of alienation in college students with reference to the university setting. The construct validity is based on item-to-total analysis and factor analysis by correlating the UAS with the Dean Alienation Scale (Dean, 1961) which measures feelings of alienation relative to society. The coefficients are .79, .89, and .72 for powerlessness, meaninglessness, and social estrangement, respectively. The corrected reliability for the total scale if .92. All scale items have been found to contribute to the measurement of the scale's general properties.

The JWS consists of 20 6-point Likert-type items that assess the extent to which an individual believes in a just world. Eleven of the randomly assigned items, have been designed to represent agreement with a "just world bias" (scored positively) and the other items to represent an "unjust world" bias (scored negatively). Respondents indicate the degree of agreement or disagreement with each statement. Kuder-Richardson internal consistency reliability scores are reported at .80 and .81 respectively for samples of college students. Predictive and construct validity are documented by Rubin & Peplau (1975).

Data Anaysis

The study examined the relationships among the following: Perceived personal competencies; degree of feelings of alienation;

and belief in a just world. Multiple regression analyses were employed to find the contribution of the belief in a just world and perceived personal competencies to the variability within feelings of alienation from the university by black freshmen.

RESULTS

Forty freshmen returned the survey packets. The sample was comprised of 60% (24) females and 40% (16) males. The largest group of students had fathers (39%) and mothers (43.6%) with at least a high school education and were from cities with a population in the range of 100,000-500,000 ((48.7%). Table I presents parental educational backgrounds and population of cities of origin. These demographic results closely reflected that of the total black freshmen population (N=115). Participants' mean high school GPA was 3.2 (on a 4.0 scale), and mean ACT score was found to be 15.8.

A significant correlation ($p<.05$) was found between feelings of personal competency and belief in a just world ($r=.39$; $p=.01$). Results indicate that the higher the personal competency score the greater the tendency to believe in a just world.

The belief in a just world and feelings of alienation were found to be significantly and negatively correlated ($r=-.32$; $p=.04$), indicating that the greater the tendency to believe in a just world, the less of a tendency to report feelings of alienation. This relationship also heal true for the relationship between feelings of personal competency and feelings of alienation ($r=-.37$; $p=.01$). The greater

the tendency to report perceived general competency, black students tended to report feelings of alienation to a lesser degree. All correlations between variables are presented in Table II.

Table III presents the results the multiple regression with alienation as the dependent variable and believed personal competency (PCI)and the belief in a just world (JWS) as independent variables. A significant effect was found ($F(2,37)=3.97$; $p=.0273$) with JWS and PCI scores accounting for approximately 18% (R square=17.68) of the variance within reported feelings of alienation.

DISCUSSION

Results indicated that both hypotheses initially stated in the introduction would be accepted. Black students who had adopted white middle-class values and tended to believe moreso in a just world expressed feelings of alienation to a lesser degree than those who had not. Such students also tended to perceive themselves as overall more competent than those who believed in a just world to a lesser extent. This finding supports a previous study which found that the belief in a just world was significantly and positively correlated with personal efficacy (Collins, 1974).

On the surface these results seem quite innocuous. Readers might confortably conclude that black students who think like middle-class whites are accepted and will experience no difficulty. However, upon closer examination of other significant correlates of the Just World Scale scores found in previous studies, a clearer picture of whom the acculturated black student

is and what issues they might experience in spite of lower expressed feelings of alienation becomes apparent.

Just World Scale scores have been found to be significantly and positively correlated with: submission to authority (Rubin & Peplau, 1973); institutional trust, trust in others' sincerity, trust that one will not be taken advantage of by others and uncritical aceptance of authority (Gink & Guttenplan, 1975; Rubin & Peplau, 1975); internal locus of control--the expectation that one can determine one's own rewards and punishments, rather than being at the mercy pf external forces (Rotter, 1966; Zuckerman & Gerbasi, 1975); high perseverance in the face of difficult tasks (Garrett, 1974; Lerner, 1973; Mirels & Garrett, 1971); a tendency to derogate social victims, agreeing that "most people on welfare are lazy" (MacDonald, 1972); and, an intolerance for cognitive dissonance (Steiner & Johnson, 1963).. Given these additional characteristics of those who tend to adopt the stance of believing in a just world, it would appear critical that social scientists take a closer examination of the costs entailed by black Americans who adopt middle-class white values in order to feel less alienated and what this might mean for the black university student.

Using the results of this study the researcher will present a skeletal description of the acculturated black university student on a predominantly white campus.

> This student is one that perceives self as generally competent. Upon arrival, this student will more than likely feel prepared to take on the challenge of university life. He/she will also probably have had some positive experiences in relationships with white and black peers and adults wherein some form of personal validation has occurred.

Self-confidence and high expectations for success are visible for all to see.

Some might predict success as being the only possible outcome for such students, black or white. The benefits seem obvious, students will experience less alienation and pose a better fit to the environment. It could be hypothesized that such a fit would also increase the probability of academic success. The benefits appear clear, but the costs of black students adopting white middle-class values remain unidentified. Are there costs to doing so? The current researchers believe the answer to this critifcal question lies in the other significant correlates of the belief in a just world.

Submission to authority

Submission to authority works well when those in high power positions have those in lower status positions best interest in mind. This can be very validating and rewarding for those in lower status positions when consistent, clearly defined rules have been identified and specific rewards for adhering to these guidelines toward success of indicated. Howver, what happens when the rules for success that apply for one member are not the same for another? What happens when those in authority to not have the best interest in mind for all of those in lower status positions (ei. a professor and a studen)? What happens to the black student who has consistently followed all of the rules prior to enrollment, have experienced success personally and academically in the environment of origin, and suddenly finds that the same rules that result in a validating response from professors and university staff to-

ward white peers, does not have the same result when he/she abides by them? Black students who have adopted middle-class white values, might, in fact, arrive on campus feeling as if they will fit in, and slowly begin to experience the discomfort of being treated differently and possibly not understanding why.

Unquestionable trust in others

The ability to trust others at some level is critical to the development of healthy relationships. However, in relationships where trust is undeserved and an individual continues to trust in a system, a concept, or in individual(s) who do not have their best interest in mind, the possibility for both physical and emotional damage to the individual will increase. What happens to the black student who enters believing that all they encounter have their best interest in mind? What happens to the black student who believes that they are incompetent because a professor continues to give grades lower than they are accustom to receiving without feedback or rationale? What happens to the black student whose counselor maintains that it it the student that must become more appropriately assertive, so that they can receive the validation that has so far evaded them in spite of all attempts to play by the ruiles? What happens to the black student who once believed in their personal competency and is bombarded with information that conflicts with the previously high positive self worth? What happens to the black student who believes and believes until all that left to believe is the existence of a negative self-image ?

High Perseverance in the Face of a Difficult Task

This characteristic is one that many all teachers, university faculty and staff, and employers would find valuable. The willingness to continue in spite of the challenge of a struggle is valued by our society as a whole. However, when the task is unresolvable without the assistance of others in the environment or without adjustment of individuals within a system, presevering to solve a problem alone would eventually lead to frustration and feelings of failure. The black student who is told to change in order to make things better for themselves when in fact it is the professor/staff member or other student(s) who is, in fact, the primary contributor to the problem, might find themselves in such a bind. The black student who is told to develop better social skills when faced with rejection without the counselor considering racism as an alternative explanation would be an example of a situation where such an acculturated black student would easily become frustrated, tire, and perceive self as a failure personally and academically.

Derogation of other Social Victims

It is important to note that these young acculturated black students may arrive with little positive group affiliation for other members of the same race. They may also tend to question the competency of black peers who are perceived as less acculturated. They might have separated themselves from the very support network which could assist in understanding the impact of being black on a predominantly white campus.

Internal Locus of Control

Internal control refers to individual's belief that reinforcements are contingent on their own actions and that individuals can shape their own fate. Rotter (1966) found that high internality correlated with: (a) greater attempts at mastering the environment; (b) superior coping strategies; (c) better cognitive processing of information; (d) lower predispostion to anxiety; (e) higher achievement motivation; (f) greater social action involvement; and (g) placing greater value on skill determined rewards. These attributes are highly valued by the U.S. society (Sue, 1975). However, the costs for maintaining this belief system might become more apparent if the responsibility for negative events is fully but, erroneously assumed and those around the individual reinforce such thinking. What about the students who begin to question the experience of being treated differently and all fingers point to them as the blame? What happens to these students if they, too, come to the same conclusions?

Intolerance for Cognitive Dissonance

Cognitive dissonance is the state of conflict between belief and experience which usually results in strong negative feelings that render individuals dysfunctional. One of these strong negative emotions is likely to be depression(Beck, Rush, Shaw, & Emery, 1978) which often renders individuals incapable of effectively engaging in the kind of cognitive tasks required to function academically. Given the previously mentioned possibilities, such an intolerance could lead the usually self-confident individual with high expectations for success to become one

with a negative self-concept with high expectations for failure.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, these results seem to indicate that black students who do adopt the belief in a just world as the primary mode of functioning without question, is in danger of also adopting the belief that something is inherently wrong with them. If those around them tell them that they do not see what they do see and should not feel what they do feel, and they happen to exist in an enviornment wherein which they are not exposed to others with shared experiences and who understand the dynamics of racism, the only alternative is to feel badly about oneself. It would make sense that the black student who has adopted the belief in a just world would report feelings of alienation less often than those who do not, for such a student would be in full agreement with those in a less than racially sensitive environment in which they have chosen to function. Both the student and those around them would believe that somehow it is the student who is fully responsible for any negative experience that might occur. It is the victim, even one who is not aware he/she is being victimized, who is to blame. Thinking middle-class white may potentially be lethal for black students' self worth on the predominantly white campus.

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TABLE I
Demographic Information

Table Ia

Frequencies of varying eduation levels of parents of student sample

	Father		Mother	
Level	#	%	#	%
1	2	4.9	1	2.6
2	16	39.0	17	43.6
3	2	4.9	6	15.4
4	7	17.1	10	25.6
5	6	14.6	2	5.1
6	0	0	0	0
7	8	19.5	3	7.7

Level 1 = Elementary
2 = High School
3 = Some College
4 = Bachelors
5 = Masters
6 = Ph.D.
7 = No Response

Table Ib

Hometown Population sizes of student sample

Population	#	%
0 - 50,000	14	35.8
50,001 - 100,000	2	5.1
100,001 - 500,000	19	48.7
500,001 - 1,000,000	0	0
1,000,000+	4	10.2

TABLE II
CORRELATION MATRIX
PRESENTING PEARSON PRODUCT R COEFFICIENTS
AMONG ALL VARIABLES

	JWS	PCI	ALIEN
JWS		.39 p=.01	-.32 p=.04
PCI			-.37 P=.01

JWS: Just World Scale Scores

PCI: Perceived Personal Competencies Inventory scores

ALIEN: University Alienation Scale scores

TABLE III

MULTIPLE REGRESSION
UAS AS DEPENDENT VARIABLE
PCI AND JWS AS INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Multiple R	.42054	R Square Change	.17685
R Square	.17685	F Change	3.97466
Adjusted R Square	.13236	Standard Error	12.36080
Significant F	.0273		